

- Acknowledge and respect tribal sovereignty.
- Achieve a settlement that is fair to both the Indian community and the general public.
- Achieve the most resource-efficient settlement of claims (in terms of conserving federal government and tribal time, money, and staff).
- Encourage settlement by providing incentives to settle and disincentives to litigate.
- Use the most informal settlement processes available rather than litigation to encourage tribal participation.
- Obtain funding for the settlement without reducing appropriations for the BIA and Special Trustee budgets and tribal programs.
- Achieve agreement on account balances through September 30, 1992, or the date of settlement, as an agreed-upon starting point for the future.

The Department's Recommendations build on the legislative options for settlement that the Department submitted to Congress on December 11, 1996, and that we sent to you at the same time. After submitting the options to Congress, the Department consulted with and provided an opportunity for written comments from tribal representatives throughout the country about the approaches we were considering. A copy of the Report on the Recommendations of the Department was distributed to all Tribal Leaders on November 13, 1997.

All oral comments presented by tribes and individuals at these consultation meetings will be recorded and transcribed.

Summaries of the meetings will be available for public inspection and copying ten days following the meeting.

Dated: January 23, 1998.

Kevin Gover,

Assistant Secretary—Indian Affairs.

[FR Doc. 98-2094 Filed 1-28-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-02-U

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

Order of Temporary Closure to Non-Authorized Use of Certain Public Lands in Ward Valley, San Bernardino County, CA

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Needles Field Office.

ACTION: Order of temporary closure to non-authorized uses of public lands.

SUMMARY: This order closes approximately 2,000 acres within Ward Valley, California to all uses, including

but not limited to camping, motorized vehicle use, recreation, and casual use, unless those uses are otherwise specifically authorized by the Bureau of Land Management. This closure does not affect uses authorized by any right-of-way, permit, or other valid authorization approved by the BLM authorized officer for the public lands described in this order, except that the existing protest encampment maintained by the Fort Mojave Tribe under BLM permit CA-37890 shall be relocated to site E, as described in permit CA-37890, consistent with the terms provided in permit CA-37890. No activities authorized by the encampment permit shall be undertaken outside the cleared area of site E on any lands closed pursuant to this notice. The closure covers the following public lands:

T. 9 N., R. 19 E., SBM
 Sec 22, S $\frac{1}{2}$;
 Sec 23, W $\frac{1}{2}$ of SW $\frac{1}{4}$;
 Sec 26, W $\frac{1}{2}$ of W $\frac{1}{2}$;
 Sec 27, all;
 Sec 34, all;
 Sec 35, W $\frac{1}{2}$ W $\frac{1}{2}$.

EFFECTIVE DATE: The closure will become effective February 13, 1998 and will remain effective for a period of six months from the effective date, unless terminated earlier through an order reopening the lands upon completion of the drilling activities referenced below.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The purpose of this temporary closure is to ensure that drilling and related activities to be undertaken by the Department of the Interior and the California Department of Health Services pursuant to a decision record issued January 16, 1998, at the Ward Valley site are carried out under conditions which will ensure public safety, promote site security, and provide for integrity of the sampling activities. Authority for this closure may be found in Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations 8364.1. The closure effected by this order is the minimum necessary for effective law enforcement because it is the minimum which will allow for control of access from Interstate 40.

This closure was analyzed in environmental assessment CA-069-EA7-42. The closure is within the scope of the Finding of No Significant Impacts prepared on EA CA-069-EA7-42. The impacts identified were temporary and minor.

This order constitutes the final decision of the Department.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Molly Brady, Field Manager, U.S. D.I., Bureau of Land Management, Needles Field Office, 101 West Spikes Road,

Needles, California 92363, tel: (760) 326-7000.

Approved: January 26, 1998.

Bob Armstrong,

Assistant Secretary, Lands and Minerals Management.

[FR Doc. 98-2312 Filed 1-27-98; 9:02 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[WY-985-0777-66]

Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for Coalbed Methane Development Projects South of Gillette, Wyoming

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for Coalbed Methane Development Projects South of Gillette, Wyoming, in Campbell County.

SUMMARY: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) must analyze the impacts of actions we permit on Federal lands and minerals. As part of this analysis, the cumulative affects of the proposed action and other activities occurring in the area must be considered. Three Environmental Assessments (EA) (Pistol Point, Marquiss, and Lighthouse) and one Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (Gillette South) to address proposed coalbed methane (CBM) development have been completed for the area south of Gillette. When we completed the EIS in October of 1997, the apparent success of the coalbed methane play was drawing additional operators into the basin.

Feedback we received from industry indicated we could see an additional 2,600 to 3,000 CBM wells south of Gillette by the year 2007 if development success continues as it has been. With this information, BLM decided another EIS would be necessary to address this additional interest.

DATES: Comments to be considered in the draft EIS should be submitted by March 2, 1998. The draft EIS should be available for public review by October of 1998.

ADDRESSES: Questions or concerns should be addressed to Richard Zander in the BLM Buffalo Resource Area Office, 1425 Fort Street, Buffalo, WY 82834.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Richard Zander, phone 307-684-1100.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: When we began preparation of the Gillette South CBM EIS in June of 1996, we had developed a proposed action to analyze a total of 640 CBM wells. This proposed action was based on the best available information we had from industry at that time. It took into account potential development based on depth to coal and what industry knew at that time about the potential to produce methane from the coal. The proposed action also included the prior Marquiss and Lighthouse CBM projects to address developmental changes which had occurred since these two projects had been analyzed by EAs. When we completed the EIS in October of 1997, the apparent success of the coalbed methane play was drawing additional operators into the basin. The following are some of the major issues raised during the preparation of the Gillette South CBM EIS. These issues are provided to help you understand what has occurred in past environmental documents and perhaps stimulate addition thoughts, questions, and issues.

- People were concerned with the loss of hydraulic head related to groundwater associated with the coal seam. Concerns related to lowering of water levels and increased pumping costs because water would have to be pumped from greater depths.

- Concerns were voiced on how the differentiation would be made between coal mine-caused and coalbed methane-caused impacts to the lowering of the water in the coal seam. How would the responsible entity be identified?

- Questions were posed on what effects the coalbed methane development would have on air quality. Of concern were possible hazardous emissions and pollutants released as a result of compressor emissions.

- Disposing water on the surface raised concerns about water quality due to possible increased erosion and possible weed infestations because of water flow fluctuations.

- Questions were raised about the use of produced water for dust control, stock watering, and the creation of wetlands. What were the ramifications of using this water in this manner?

- Concern was voiced that the mines had been venting methane for years and now we had companies working to recover the methane and pay royalty on production. Were we going to make the mines pay back royalty and future royalty for the methane they vent?

- There were concerns that we had not done further groundwater modeling to predict possible drawdowns and impacts.

- Concern was voiced about the use of the 1988 CHIA (Cumulative Potential Hydrologic Impacts of Surface Coal Mining in the Eastern Powder River Structural Basin, Northeastern Wyoming) and how this affected cumulative impacts.

- Concerns were voiced that previous documents had underestimated the magnitude of impacts when in actuality we had underestimated rate of impact occurrence.

- Concerns were raised that we had not addressed impacts to threatened and endangered species, raptors, and fisheries.

- Concern was expressed about the effects of surface disposal of water and operating a ranch with ongoing methane development operations.

BLM held a meeting with companies on November 19, 1997, to discuss the implications of the recently signed Record of Decision for the Gillette South EIS. This meeting covered the mitigation steps that would be required of those operators developing Federal minerals. Specifically covered were monitoring requirements, use of the Water Well Agreement, and the formation of a groundwater monitoring group similar to the coal industry's Gillette Area Groundwater Monitoring Organization (GAGMO) Group. Another topic of discussion was the question of where the CBM operators thought development was headed. No specifics were voiced at this meeting, but the general consensus was that development over and above that analyzed in the Gillette South EIS was a certainty. BLM asked the operators to provide us feedback on their development plans so we could plan for future environmental analysis needs.

Feedback we received from industry indicated we could see an additional 2,600 to 3,000 CBM wells south of Gillette by the year 2007 if development success continues as it has been. With this information, BLM decided another EIS would be necessary to address this additional interest.

A public scoping meeting will be held on February 5, 1998, at 7 p.m., at the Holiday Inn in Gillette, Wyoming, to discuss this increased industry interest and solicit comments, questions, issues, or concerns you may have. We will use the feedback in the preparation of the EIS.

Dated: January 22, 1998.

Alan R. Pierson,
State Director.

[FR Doc. 98-2156 Filed 1-28-98; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

Notice of Intent To Prepare a Joint Environmental Impact Report/ Environmental Impact Statement on a Proposed 30-year Expansion and Waste Management Plan for the MolyCorp Mountain Pass Mine, Mountain Pass, California

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare a Joint Environmental Impact Report (EIR)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on a proposed 30-year expansion and waste management plan for the MolyCorp Mountain Pass Mine, Mountain Pass, California and notice of scoping meeting.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Needles Field Office, and the County of San Bernardino, in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act, will be directing the preparation of a joint EIR/EIS to be prepared by a third-party contractor on the impacts of a proposed 30-year mine expansion and waste management plan for the MolyCorp Mountain Pass Mine, located in Mountain Pass, San Bernardino County, California.

DATES: Written comments will be accepted until February 28, 1998. A public scoping meeting will be held beginning at 7 p.m. on February 3, 1998, at the Baker Community Center, 73730 Baker Boulevard, Unit C, Baker, California.

ADDRESSES: Comments should be sent to the Needles Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, 101 West Spike's Road, Needles, California 92363, ATTN: MolyCorp Mountain Pass Mine Project.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT: George R. Meckfessel, Planning and Environmental Coordinator, at (760) 326-7000.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In the early 1990s, MolyCorp Inc. (MolyCorp) developed a plan to expand its mining operations for an additional 30 years. Because the expansion area would exceed 25 percent of the vested area, MolyCorp was required to obtain a Mining Conditional Use Permit from the County of San Bernardino. At the time that MolyCorp proposed to expand its mining operations, portions of the main mine site were located on public land managed by BLM. Therefore, the original environmental review for the project was planned to be an EIR/EIS.